

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK CARTER JUMPS A TRAIN AND TAKES BIG CHANCES



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
NICK CARTER

WITH A BOUND, NICK GRABS THE SATCHEL AND CATCHES THE STEPS OF THE LAST CAR AS THE TRAIN WHIRLS PAST.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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Nick Carter Jumps a Train

AND

TAKES BIG CHANCES

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A MESSAGE OF MYSTERY.

A queer telegram lay upon the desk of Nick Carter, the celebrated New York detective.

Rather—a "queered" telegram.

It had arrived at noon, and it was dated that morning at Dobson, Colorado.

The telegram read as follows:

"Mr. Nicholas Carter: At once surround horse and warm. A prize file I can Prof. John Drummond, Latoka.

"RICHARD HINE."

This strange telegram, three hours after its reception, was still under active discussion.

At first flash it was gibberish, pure and simple.

The famous secret service expert had puzzled his mind over it for barely two minutes, however.

Putting on his hat, Nick had left the house then, noting the branch office from which it had been sent.

He had just returned, and found Chick and Patsy, his two professional assistants, poring over the bit of yellow paper, as he had left them.

Both looked up eagerly; in a pointed and confident way Chick briefly intoned the word:

"Well?"

"I have run down the telegram," declared Nick, "and found that Dobson is a mere dot on the railroad map."

"Yes, we found that out."

"The telegram was sent by the one local operator at that point at 5:30 a. m."

"Who is the sender?"

"The operator does not know."

"And you do not know this Richard Hine?"

"No."

"Never heard the name before?"

"Never. Yet he knows me, professionally. That telegram was meant for a distinct direction."

"You think so?"

"I got in touch with the Dobson operator."

"What did he say?"

"I asked for information regarding the sender. He made a rather peculiar statement."

"What was it?" questioned Chick.

"The message, enclosing money pre-payment, was thrown from the window of a palace coach as the morning train whizzed by the station."

"Sensational, that!" observed Chick.

"Highly so."

"That ended the operator's statement?"

"Slick and clean."

"But not your investigation?"

"Scarcely. I followed up the train; I caught it with a message two hundred miles farther on."

"And had the conductor search out this mysterious sender of flying messages?"

"He made some inquiry, yes."

"The result?"

"Nothing. No person answering to the name of Richard Hine was then aboard the train."

"This is rather disappointing," began Chick.

"In a measure," assented Nick—"although there is a certain compensation."

"In what respect?"

"This: I have translated the message."

"May we hear it?"

"Certainly. Hand me the telegram."

Patsy did so; Nick read it over rapidly aloud.

Then he explained.

"The jargon the operator at Dobson made of a message hastily scrawled on a fast-jolting train, possibly by a poor pen-

man at the best, is responsible for the mix-up."

"Did you question him on that point?"

"He admitted it—said some words in the original screed were utterly obscure and unintelligible."

"So he filled in?"

"The best he knew. After studying the message from memory since I left here," proceeded Nick, "I arrived at a conclusion that it read about this way."

And Nick read:

"Mr. Nicholas Carter: At once surround house and warn——"

"Ah!" murmured Chick.

"Apprise till I come, Professor John Drummond, Latoka."

"That's it!" declared Patsy.

"That seems to me the most reasonable way to construe it," said Nick.

"Then?" interrogated Chick.

"Why, I will look the matter up, of course."

"In other words," continued Chick, with briskness, "this Richard Hine directs you to surround the house of one Professor John Drummond."

"Latoka."

"Where is that?"

"Ten miles up the Hudson."

"And warn him."

"Precisely."

"Of what?"

"How can I tell?"

"Till Richard Hine 'comes to apprise'?"

"No, till I see this 'professor,' who, on the strength of the message, may be able to guess how matters stand."

"Good!"

Nick left home headquarters at once.

It was his way to investigate professional matters promptly—more expeditiously when peril to some person or persons seemed impending.

Both names—Drummond and Hine—were totally unfamiliar to the detective.

Latoka was quite a little journey, and Nick was not at all acquainted there.

Still, the names might quite as plausibly be mispelled as a part of the main body of the message.

Nick reached Latoka, a rather extensive summering hamlet on the Hudson River, in about two hours.

He looked over its scattered houses. Then he approached the lounging driver of the one depot conveyance of the place.

"Professor John Drummond?" interrogated Nick.

"Step in—take you right up there," declared the Jehu, getting into action.

"Far?"

"Half a mile."

"Drive slowly. I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Free, those."

"This Professor Drummond—?"

"New comer."

"How new?"

"A month ago."

"Indeed?"

"Yes—he bought out the Muller layout."

"And what may 'the Muller layout' be, my friend?"

"Never heard of that?"

"I belong in New York."

"Oh! I suppose dead, sleepy Latoka and all about it doesn't interest New Yorkers."

"Naturally."

"Well, then, Muller was the great collector?"

"Of what?"

"Animals—dead and alive."

"I see."

"Birds—dead and alive."

"Zoologist? Ornithologist?"

"I reckon you have it."

"That was his hobby, eh?"

"Regular crank on such subjects."

"And a month ago, you say, he sold out?"

"To this Professor John Drummond."

"Who is he?"

"Another crank!"

"In the same line?"

"Only worse. He mixes in gardening. Raises squashes and such things in glass molds, bringing out the most horrible distortions—roses as big as cabbages."

"Lives alone?"

"Quite, except for six servants."

"New servants?"

"Oh, no! he retained the whole old Muller retinue. An easy, happy old fellow, the professor enjoys life with his fads and hobbies."

"Innocent ones, though."

"I should say—not!"

The driver gave this answer with a decided frown and a particular emphasis.

"Explain," suggested Nick.

"See that?"

The driver held up his hand to indicate a long deep scratch clear across its back.

"That looks as if you had run into a big nail," observed Nick.

"Well, not exactly. Look at that!"

The driver tilted back his hat.

One temple was black and blue—just above it a three-inch patch of hair was missing.

"What has that to do with Professor John Drummond?" inquired Nick, quite curiously.

"Everything."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; he hired me to do some carting for him day before yesterday."

"Some of his curiosities?"

"One of his curiosities."

"Living, I presume?" hinted Nick, with a slight smile.

"Alive and kicking, and—horrible! The monster tackled me as I was shifting him in his box to my dray."

"Monster?"

"Nothing better!"

"Wild animal, then?"

"Wild? Human, I should put it!"

"How is that?"

"The professor called it his 'missing link!'"

CHAPTER II.

NICK CARTER MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

"The missing link, eh?" repeated Nick.

The driver of the depot stage nodded savagely.

"A man-eater, a terror!" he observed, with earnestness. "The professor welcome!"

comed it as if he'd been given a gold

Nick, from all this, had got a clear insight of the character and tendencies of the person he soon expected to see.

The magnificent place at which the conveyance now stopped carried out further the impression previously conveyed.

It comprised several acres, walled in with stone. There was a staunch, handsome brick house and several conservatories and other isolated buildings, showing progressive accommodation for things floral and menagerie-like.

Nick dismissed the driver, ascended the front steps of the house, and rang the doorbell.

A servant answered the summons; the professor was at home.

"A stranger, but on pressing business," announced Nick.

The servant politely showed in the detective.

Evidently he was not unused to unknown visitors; they probably came in droves to prey on the enthusiastic old naturalist.

Nick was ushered into a large, light and airy room, edged with cabinets containing a vast aggregation of marine curiosities.

A seemingly elderly man was bending over a table, with a flat, long knife in his hand, mixing up some powdery stuff.

The moment that Nick inspected him

closely, however, he discovered that this aspect of extreme age was not actual, but assumed.

Professor John Drummond was disguised—from his long white beard and pinkish spectacles, down to his quaint coat and other garments that he wore.

"Professor Drummond," began Nick, but the latter interrupted him with the words:

"Whom have I the honor—"

Then he interrupted himself—forcibly, suddenly, sensationally.

Turning, the instant his eyes lit on his visitor, the professor gave a gasp, and staggered back, clutching the table for support.

"I thought so!" soliloquized Nick.

The professor stared at the detective in profound embarrassment.

Rather quizzically Nick returned the penetrating look.

"It seems you know me?" observed Nick.

"Oh, yes," with fervor.

"Do I know you?"

"Try and see, Mr. Carter!"

"I will try," bowed Nick, deliberately.

He tackled the puzzle in an analytical way.

Nick tried to penetrate the disguise to learn what manner of man this person might be.

A swift conjunction of ideas led the expert detective straight to the point.

"Shergold Hume!" Nick almost immediately announced.

"Really!" exclaimed the other.

He put out his hand, smiling and gratified, and Nick took it with a good deal of pleasure.

"I fail to understand," suggested the latter.

"Which involves quite an explanation."

"It seems so," said Nick, glancing about the queer place.

"You are my first discoverer," announced the professor.

"So?"

"I hope—my last."

"Incog?"

"Perpetually!"

"I think I understand," said Nick, in a meaning way.

"Then you appreciate the necessity of the disguise, and its continuance?"

"Certainly."

"Be seated, Mr. Carter. How did you come to drop down upon me?"

"Let that explanation follow later."

"Very well—and first?"

"How do you come to be here in a position to be dropped down upon?"

"Ah, I must exist somewhere!"

"But so near——"

"New York?"

"No, the people who make New York dangerous."

The professor fidgeted a little.

"Hence, the disguise!" he intimated.

"I pierced it."

"But—you are Nick Carter!"

"Ah!"

"The man I swear by—who knows me like a book."

"Now, then, Hume—this mystery?"

Nick's question was pertinent. The detective had recognized in the disguised professor an old associate and friend.

It was five years since he had last seen this man.

Hume had come from Boston at that time on the track of a gang of five dangerous bank wreckers.

Nick had set him right on the trail, and Hume had captured them.

He had sent the five to jail for various terms, and had got five thousand dollars apiece for the task.

He had sent Nick Carter a souvenir of his clever co-operation, and a letter.

It apprised Nick that the writer was inclined to abandon his profession, and

follow a hobby he had cherished for years.

He had now the means to start his pet scheme.

This was the cultivation of rare orchids in the beautiful San Jacinto valley.

And, plainly, Hume intimated that he was urged to this step of practical isolation—though in a most congenial and delightful pursuit—by a memory of a peril that would be life-long.

He had received a twenty-five thousand dollar reward for caging the bank wreckers.

But he had aroused their eternal hatred. In the prison dock they had sworn a great oath, a terrible oath of vengeance!

So Hume had disappeared; now he had come back into the world, strangely enough into Nick Carter's world.

"And why?" interrogated the detective, after Hume had rapidly and briefly gone over all this past dramatic history.

"Luck," declared Hume, with a careless shrug of his shoulders.

"Fate?"

"Why should it be?"

"How do we ever know?"

"That is true—still, it comes quite naturally."

"I suppose so."

"In California I met Professor Muller. He fascinated, tempted me with his lay-out."

"This?"

"Precisely."

"In what way?"

"He had been offered a lucrative position, to take charge of a great museum in Antwerp, and was about to abandon to auction the accumulations of years. I bought him out."

"I see."

"I realized that the East was dangerous territory for me, yet I risked it. Why not? I rarely go out; my work is absorbing, constant. In fact, except to look you

up, as I anticipated, I would not probably go to New York once a year."

"And then disguised?"

"Always disguised. This is my paradise—why not a haven? I am Professor John Drummond. Hume has disappeared—his identity and name are dead."

Suddenly Nick looked serious. The professor's remarks had led up to a suggestive point.

"I beg pardon, Hume," said the detective, "but there is something wrong. You err in the declaration that the name is dead."

"What do you mean?"

"This—a slip might betray you at any time."

"But why should the slip be made?"

"By others."

"There are few 'others.' "

"Friends?"

"I have purposely avoided them."

"Relatives?"

"They are very few."

"And yet one of them wires broadcast across the continent your name," said Nick.

"What!" exclaimed the professor, vaguely.

"It is true."

"Wires broadcast—"

"Your name—or, rather, but for a telegraph operator's stupidity, would have done so."

"Mr. Carter, you are dealing in mystery!"

"Let me explain. Read that."

Nick gave him the telegram, observing, anent its signature:

"Richard Hine—Hume?"

"Yes, Hume!" cried the professor, quite excitedly.

"It was meant for that?"

"Of course."

"Your son?"

"My son."

"Then—you see?"

But the professor was struggling with the misplaced words.

Nick promptly translated the telegram.

He watched his companion's face; it assumed a deep pallor.

"I don't like this!" muttered the professor, thoughtfully.

"No more do I," declared Nick.

"What does he mean?"

"To warn you, of course."

"Of what?"

"Can you not surmise?"

"I can't, Mr. Carter."

"Of peril."

"Well, perhaps."

"No doubt about it! He wires me, and I did not even know of his existence. That convinces me that the old matters ——"

"The bank matters."

"Yes."

"They are on my trail!"

"Possibly," said Nick Carter.

CHAPTER III.

"THE MISSING LINK."

For a few moments Professor John Drummond was shaken; then he again shrugged his shoulders.

"Impossible!" he declared, in a less gloomy tone.

"Oh! not impossible, Hume."

"Well, improbable, then. I have worked with extreme caution. Only two of the men I sent up have completed their terms—the earliest less than three months since."

"Ninety days is a good deal of time for a man with a resolute idea in his head."

"True."

"And a bad idea at that. Suppose we follow your son's advice?"

"But how could he learn—"

"We waste time idly speculating."

"And he told you to warn me? Well, I am warned."

"And suggested surrounding the house."

"Not that, Mr. Carter!" broke out the professor.

"Why not?"

"It is not necessary. It is a jail, a fortress. I have six trusted servants. No! no! give yourself no trouble. You have done the friendly part. When Richard comes—we shall see, then."

"Be at least vigilant, wary."

"Oh, surely. And he was not on the train you wired after?"

"Or would not answer to his name."

"That is it. Perhaps he really has found out something, and became cautious after acting quite foolishly in using his real name. Now, then, that is settled!"

"Settled?"

"Isn't it?"

"If you will follow my injunctions of caution."

"I certainly will. Now, then, Mr Carter, let me show you my treasures."

"I shall be pleased to see them."

The professor had quite airily dismissed from his mind the theme uppermost in discussion.

Not so Nick; he felt a presentiment that there was urgency in the message of mystery.

Still, as he passed about the place, he found the report of the ex-detective to be well-founded.

With the exercise of ordinary carefulness, the extremely well-built house could be made practically burglar-proof.

Nick was a good deal surprised at the vastness of this great storehouse and its variety of natural wonders.

The professor, however, seemed to forget the presumable peril Nick had come to warn him about as he entered a room on the second floor.

It was his own private sleeping apartment.

A door leading into a second room was open; the professor passed its threshold.

His eyes flashed; ardor and pride and eagerness lingered in his manner and attitude as he said:

"But here is my real acquisition, Mr. Carter!"

Nick comprehended what was coming, but he merely said:

"And what is that?"

"The missing link!"

"A new adaptation of an obsolete and worn-out idea?"

"The idea is there—it will never wear out!"

"You mean?"

"The sure Darwinian theory that it is but a step from man to the ape."

"And there is your ape."

They had entered the inner room now.

Nick very interestedly viewed what it contained.

In its centre was the box or cage that the stage driver had described.

This held an object more suggestively human than any of its class Nick had ever seen before.

It was evidently a medium-sized orang-outang, and its manner and its movements showed training, or rare natural progression.

It chattered, and the tones were quite human, while the expression of its eyes was varying and intense.

"You have quite a specimen," admitted Nick.

"A rare, royal one!" declared the professor with enthusiasm. "I shall make something out of our friend here, believe me. I am studying him, watching him; when we get better acquainted, I hope to make rapid advancement. At present he is sullen, ugly and dangerous. I am trying some cereal food, and hope to tame him."

"Where did you get the animal?"

"Mr. Carter, a good many skilled

scientists have doubted if it is an animal."

"Preposterous!"

"Well, well, we shall see; there is keen intelligence there, once-aroused and directed right."

"And cunning and brutality of no ordinary kind."

"A natural streak, only."

"Where did you get the—subject?"

"From a show. A man approached me on the matter of acquiring this splendid specimen a week ago. He offered it remarkably cheap."

"And you closed with him?"

"At once."

"Of course you keep the subject closely locked up?"

"I have to."

"How's that?"

"They forgot to send the key to the cage."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I wrote for it, and expect it in a day or two. Then I shall try judicious freedom with my charge."

They came down stairs again.

Nick prepared to take his departure. He repeated his former advice of care and vigilance pending the expected arrival of his host's son.

"It will be an easy thing to post a man or two about the place," he suggested.

"Positively—no!"

"Not necessary, you think?"

"Not at all," declared Hume. "In fact, come to get over the first excitement of the scare, Mr. Carter, I would not be surprised if my son's anxiety covered some other thought of danger."

"It may be so. You have made no especial appearance in public since you came back East, I believe you said?" observed Nick, interrogatively.

"Why, yes—I was in New York city once."

"When?"

"About five weeks ago."

"Oh!"

"But—disguised. It was about this." The professor indicated a little contrivance that Nick at first took for a box.

On examining it he found that its top swung on the most delicate of pivots, and below were several intricate wire loops.

"What is this?" inquired Nick.

"A trap for catching our ornithological specimens."

"I see."

"It is useful, and I went into the city to see about getting some made, and ——"

Nick nodded as he examined the contrivance, and he looked up quickly and penetratingly as the professor abruptly paused.

"Go on," he urged.

The professor indulged in a little laugh; it bore, however, a slight token of embarrassment.

"Oh, nothing!" he stammered. "I was foolish enough to waste time running off on a tangent."

"What kind of a tangent?" inquired Nick.

"Well, the old professional zeal, you know——"

"Ah?"

"Sticks to us always."

"Quite."

"I casually became interested in something that happened to strike my notice, and before I knew it I was back on the old spotting lay as though I had not abandoned the profession forever."

"Mere pastime, eh?"

"Quite that."

"Did it lead to anything?"

"Why, yes, it did; but I soon dropped the diversion as my head got back to my real work. I'll tell you about it to-morrow. You will come to dinner? I could enjoy a long chat with you."

"Very well," answered Nick.

The detective did not go back to New York at once.

Nor did he follow the lead of the professor's indifference.

Nick promptly hunted up the watch force of the town.

That night, without his being aware of it, the home of Professoer John Drummond was put under practical police surveillance.

And, unless the expected son of his old fellow-professional arrived before the next night, Nick determined to place Chick and Patsy on guard.

For, somehow, with fine intuitive sense, Nick Carter scented danger in the air.

* * * * *

Ten o'clock that evening found the secret service expert just concluding an exhaustive search of the police files.

It was rather interesting to revive his memory with the details of the case in which he had incidentally taken a hand.

Chick chanced to accompany the detective. Together they had looked up the records and photographs of the five bank-wreckers whom Shergold Hume had run down, and who had sworn that direful threat of vengeance from the prison dock.

"Well, we have secured full information," observed Nick, arising from a table at Police Headquarters and closing the last volume of the rogues' gallery portraits.

"Information we may never use," suggested Chick.

"We never can tell."

"But, in the present case, with Hume warned, guards posted, his son soon due to appear—"

"The menace will follow Hume while his life lasts, if these men have indeed got upon his trail," predicted Nick.

They passed into the outer office, and Chick approached the night telephone man to indulge in a brief chat. The chief of the service called to Nick from his private consultation room.

Its door stood open, and he had chanced to see the detective.

Some timely professional topics were casually discussed.

Then, just as Nick was again drawing on his gloves, Chick appeared at the doorway in an excited and unceremonious manner.

"One moment, please!" he said to Nick.

The detective bowed his adieu to the chief of the service.

"What is it, Chick?" he asked.

"Step this way, please."

Chick led Nick to the operator's desk.

Without preface or apology, he took up the pencil slips that were constantly coming in, comprising the reports of fire, casualties and crimes.

Chick picked out a slip.

"Look!" he said in a quick breath.

Nick's eyes flashed over the message. An expression of dismay wreathed his brow.

"Quick work!" he observed.

His lip quivered slightly—then a look of sternness came into his face.

"Lose no time!" directed Nick.

They were both out in the street in an instant.

Nick hailed the first cab.

"To Latoka!" he ordered sharply to the driver.

"A long run, sir!"

"Can you make it with your horse?"

"Of course."

"And on the double-quick?"

"Yes."

"Then you are my man. Go!"

Nick sat back among the cushions, grim and silent, as the vehicle started up.

The detective had experienced a terrible shock.

Nick Carter was going back to Latoka, because the message over the police wires shown him by Chick was dated from that suburb.

And it apprised the Metropolitan Po-

lice Department that a terrible crime—a horrid, an unusual murder—had been committed at the home of Professor John Drummond.

CHAPTER IV.

A WRONG THEORY.

Murder had been done at Latoka, and its victim was no other than the man from whom Nick Carter had parted less than six hours previously.

"Assassination under peculiarly horrible circumstances," the informal police message had briefly read.

The cab driver did not spare his horse.

Within ninety-five minutes after leaving Police Headquarters the dripping steed came to a panting halt in front of the Drummond residence.

About its gates a crowd was gathered; lights were flashing all about the house and grounds.

Nick hurried up the steps, Chick following.

During the ride neither had spoken much. Chick was oppressed with the mystery of the moment, while his superior realized the folly of speculating on a matter of which only meagre details had been furnished.

But both could reason out a natural sequence, and both were prepared for what confronted them when they passed a group at the portals of the house.

Nick pressed through the vestibule. The servant who had admitted him that day stood there pale and distracted.

He instantly recognized the caller of the afternoon, and promptly hastened up to the detective.

"Oh, sir! the professor told me of you after you left——" he began.

Nick looked eager for further information.

"Oh, Mr. Carter! you were his friend."

"Yes."

"It is terrible—it is appalling!"

"Gather your wits, my man. He is dead?"

"Murdered!"

"And the assassin?"

"Caged."

"Ah!" murmured Nick, with satisfaction.

"But—what can we do?" hopelessly muttered the man.

"At what time did the crime occur?"

"At precisely eight."

"You are exact!"

"We saw the deed done—two of the servants and myself."

"And you were in time to catch the assassin?"

"But not in time to deter him—we were in the garden."

"And the murder was done in Professor Drummond's room?"

The man nodded.

"Lead the way."

A glance, once within the upper room, informed Nick of all there was to know.

The detective's dead friend lay sideways, fallen upon a table at which he had evidently been seated when the fatal blow was delivered.

There were a dozen deep stabs in the neck and back, and from these the blood was still flowing.

Two men in semi-uniform, standing near the body, bowed gravely to Nick.

One of them recognized the celebrated detective, with a start.

Then, with cap lifted, he came forward.

"Mr. Carter," he murmured, with extreme deference.

"Yes."

"We were consulting, my partner and I. I am in charge at the local station."

"I understand," answered Nick shortly.

It annoyed him because bungling interference might have disturbed some enlightening indications.

"The weapon?" inquired Nick.

"It is with the murderer."

"With the murderer!"

"Yes; he still retains possession of it. You see, Mr. Carter, he came up slyly behind the victim."

"That is plain to trace."

"Retreating with the knife."

"He attempted to escape?"

"Not at all—he ran back into his cage."

"His cage?"

"He is there now—as you see."

And as he spoke the officer pointed into the next room.

It was lighted now, but even without a light Nick would have instantly understood.

Professor John Drummond had been murdered by his "missing link!"

As Nick stepped forward across the threshold of the connecting rooms, every thing seemed to carry out the clear, concise statement of the local officer.

Blood trailed over rugs and floor directly up to the door of the cage.

Within the cage, crouched in a corner, was the great orang-outang.

It was gibbering, and glaring at a big, broad knife, blood-stained, lying at its feet.

Nick stepped up to the cage of the animal.

When he had last noticed the cage, its strong bar lock had been firmly set in its socket.

Now it protruded beyond the door casing, but was still shot.

The door proper, however, was held shut by two strands of rope tied at the upper and the lower end of the door.

"Who did this?" inquired Nick.

"I did, sir," bowed the officer. "The animal must have ran immediately back into its cage. We found him there. I fancy we will have to take cage and all."

"Take them where?"

"To the station."

"Why to the station?"

"Under arrest."

"That animal!"

"Mr. Carter, is it an animal?" asked the officer, with perfect seriousness. "Is it human or beast—responsible or not?"

"Are you in earnest?"

"In the case of a murder done in London," smartly cited the officer, "a man brained with a hammer by an orang-outang—the question came up."

"Never mind the question now," interrupted Nick, impatiently. "This way, my man!"

The detective spoke to the servant, who advanced at once.

"Tell your story," directed Nick.

"We saw from the garden."

"What?"

"The animal."

"You are sure of that?" interrupted Nick, incisively.

"Oh, sir! two others were with me, and they saw also. It was done in a flash—we were up the stairs quickly, but—too late!"

"And the orang-outang?"

"Was back in its cage."

Nick began inspecting the door of the cage.

"You see, Mr. Carter," explained the police officer, "the animal must have pressed the door so forcibly that the bolt shot past."

"Ah!" commented Nick, briefly.

He looked for scrapes and scratches along the jamb bar.

The officer stared as Nick took out a tiny tape measure.

The detective deliberately measured the bolt end.

Instantly Nick turned an intelligent look upon his assistant.

Chick started into action—he read what that look signified.

Chick disappeared as Nick turned towards the police officer.

"My man," said the detective, "if you care to be of any service in this affair ——"

"Surely, Mr. Carter."

"Get yourself and your men into the grounds and through the village, as speedily as possible, then."

"Why, sir——"

"And make a search for the murderer."

"A search—— Why, the murderer is there!"

"No! That animal has not stirred from its cage to-night."

"Sir!"

"I saw it!" insisted the servant.

"Come here," invited Nick.

He was not in the humor to dally with stupidity.

Still, the exigencies were urgent; Nick explained.

"Do you see that lock?" he inquired.

The officer nodded.

"Professor Drummond had no key to that door."

"True—it wasn't sent with the cage," observed the servant.

"Measure that bolt; ten thousand pounds pressure could not squeeze that two-inch bolt end past the jamb—"

The officer began to stare more intently.

"Without bending the door like rubber. Again, find me a mar, a touch, with the paint and rust scraped off."

"Then, Mr. Carter—"

"The real murderer was a man."

The servant tottered—his reason was not equal to grasping the baffling mystery of his announcement, and it fairly overpowered him.

"A man," added Nick, impressively, "arrayed in the skin of an animal the counterpart of that one yonder."

"Incredible!" gasped the officer.

"Try and find him," directed Nick, sententiously.

The officer left the room like a man in a daze; his companion followed him.

Nick shut the servants out. For five minutes he examined every nook and corner of the room. For five more he investigated adjoining apartments.

Like a man on a trail, he was led finally down a rear stairway into the garden.

At the rear were two of the men servants of the house and a maid.

The latter was dashing some cold water from a pan into the face of a man lying upon the ground.

"What is this?" demanded Nick.

One of the men explained:

"We found him lying up against the side garden wall."

"Asleep?"

"Is that sleep, sir?"

Nick stooped beside the prostrate man; at once the detective recognized him.

It was the "special" he had engaged that afternoon to keep a watch about the premises for skulkers.

Nick got a whiff of his breath.

"Liquor and opium," soliloquized the detective.

Just here the man stirred, roused up. Nick gave him a stimulating shake.

He brought him to his feet and steadied him against a gate.

"Now, my man!" he spoke, sharply—"do you know who I am?"

The fellow rubbed his eyes, and stared vaguely and then shamefacedly at Nick.

"Why, yes, sir!" he mumbled.

"What does this mean?"

"Ask them."

The man pointed at the two servants.

"Us! Ask us!" exclaimed one of them.

"And why?" challenged Nick.

"They gave it to me—at least, one of them did."

"Gave you what?"

"The drink."

"Us!" cried one of the men.

"Us!" echoed the other.

Their astonishment and resentment, Nick discerned, was entirely genuine.

"Explain yourself," he directed the culprit, giving him a second shake.

"I went on duty at six, as you directed. About eight, as I was standing in the barred gateway at the rear, one of the servants came up."

"A man servant?"

"Yes."

"One of these?"

"I don't know."

"I guess he doesn't!" disclaimed one of the two attaches of the place. "At eight o'clock all three of us men about the place were sitting on the side steps, smoking."

"And had been for thirty minutes," corroborated the other.

"Well, some one did!" declared the unfaithful one. "He said I must be cold and loneome rambling around, and gave me a flask."

"Oh! he did?" muttered Nick.

"Said it was the primest ever was—from the governor's cellar."

"You took it?"

"And drank it—why not?"

"I suppose you now see why not?"

"Drugged?"

"You have guessed it."

"And it was some outsider?"

"It was the man who committed murder in this house less than three hours ago," averred Nick, solemnly.

"What! what!" cried one of the servants.

Nick briefly explained what it was necessary for them to know.

"You two join in the search," he directed. "You," addressing the watchman, "find me that flask you spoke of."

The watchman went outside the gate and began a clumsy search.

He came back in a minute or two.

"Well?" questioned Nick, who had lingered on the spot, meantime surveying keenly the shrubbery and general environment.

"I found it."

"Where is it?"

"Broken."

"You found it broken?"

"Yes, sir."

"Show me where."

The man led Nick to where the remnants of the shattered flask lay upon the grass beside a rock.

Nick lit a match, examined the wreck, and detached and pocketed the label.

Now he returned to the house. Very soon one of the officers whom he had found in the upper room reappeared.

"Mr. Carter," he said, deferentially.

"Yes?"

"Your friend, your assistant."

"What about him?" inquired Nick.

"He wants you."

"Where is he?"

"Beyond the garden—I had better show you."

Nick was led through a rear gate. Towards the river stretched an unfenced expanse.

Chick was leaning over a place where some boards had been removed from what looked like an old well.

Beside him was a large dog, and it circled about, as, pulling a string, Chick landed a bulky, dangling object.

"This way!" he spoke a little excitedly to Nick—"I saw the head of that dog as I passed the kennel."

"I understand."

"Good breed, but he ran here and would go no farther."

"You had been fishing?"

"I had been fishing," assented Chick.

"And you had found?"

"This!"

Nick Carter peered closer.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO RAILROAD TICKETS.

"The skin, the hide of an orang-outang," observed the detective.

"The one worn by the murderer of Professor Drummond?" added Chick.

The dog that had played a part in locating this tell-tale evidence in the programme of the night, leaped onto the object brought out of the well.

It then lay down beside it, its paws and nose resting against it.

Nick caught it by the collar, and tried to force the animal to take up the trail afresh.

This it would not do, and, after being urged and dragged, slunk back to its kennel.

"It would probably be at fault," remarked Nick, indicating the river significantly.

Nick lined up the local officers, and impressed upon them the value of a close inspection of the river shore—of making inquiries regarding strangers and stray boats in the vicinity.

He took up the animal skin, and lead the way back to the house.

Nick knew that the trail was cold; he therefore considered that it would be wasted effort to devote his own valuable time, or Chick's, to a vague chase.

"A man shrewd enough to encompass what this fellow has done, has made good use of his three hours start of us," he said.

"And we have no description to go by," suggested Chick.

"No, Chick—we only know that he must be one of two persons—two of the bank wrecking five—"

"Recently liberated from the Massachusetts State Prison."

"Precisely."

"Which one, and how to fasten the crime upon him—" began Nick's assistant.

"What we find at the house yonder may guide us to decide," supplemented Nick.

When they returned to the house, Nick appropriated a deserted room for himself and his colleague.

The detective at once recited his discoveries of the hour.

"What has happened," he narrated, "is

this: These people spotted Hume some time since, and got the ourang into the house."

"Under false pretences?"

"Of course."

"To act its part in the business of tonight?"

"Just that. The murderer kept the key of the cage, stole into the house, unlocked the cage, did the deed, cast the knife into the cage, and escaped. He got out as he got in."

"And how was that?"

"Through a rear passageway not in much use after dark. He drugged the watchman. So far, we have only prevented the acceptance of a stupid theory."

"The one adopted by the police that the animal killed its master?"

"Yes. Now then, Chick, here are two pretty fair clews."

Nick indicated the orang-outang's skin and the label from the broken liquor flask.

Chick flashed an interrogative glance at his superior.

"Orang-outang's skins are not the commonest things in the world," hinted Nick.

"That is true," nodded Chick.

"As to the label—"

"It is an ordinary one, it seems?"

"But with a New York saloon address printed at the bottom."

"That may serve us somewhat."

"It is certainly worth investigating. We must lose no time. This way, Chick."

Nick led his assistant into the room where the murdered man lay, as he had fallen.

Nick picked up from the table the ingenious little trap that the professor had shown him that day.

It lay where he had last seen it placed. Nick explained to Chick what it was.

Now he looked it over.

"Ah, here we have it!" he remarked, inspecting its bottom.

Chick observed the shine of a pencil line across the smooth iron base.

"What is that?" he inquired.

"An address. I suspect and hope it is the address of the man Hume went to see about making some of these contrivances the day he visited the city."

"Is that important?"

"I think so. I feel pretty certain that upon that occasion Hume ran across the old gang."

"Is that so?"

"Or, rather, unsuspected, they got on his trail."

"Why do you think this?"

"He referred vaguely to-day to being enticed into a little professional enterprise."

"Not stating what it was?"

"Hume intended to tell me about it when I called to-morrow. I reason it out that while investigating the matter in question for pure entertainment, he gave his enemies an opportunity to trace him home."

"Possibly they supposed he was working up a new case against them?"

"Yes, that is possible. We will divide the work, Chick."

"How?"

"You try and find out where that orang-outang skin came from originally."

"Yes."

"And see what the label clew produces."

"All right."

"I will make connection with the man whom Hume went to see about the traps; I think this is his address. From his place I may be able to start a trace on Hume's movements that day in the city."

Nick placed the trap in his pocket. He began looking over some papers on a desk in a corner of the room.

They mainly represented memoranda of future sales of curios, scientific jottings regarding fossils, evolution, and the general contents of the various cabinets in the house.

Nick noticed a sealed envelope in a drawer.

It was the only object in the drawer, it was marked "Personal," and it instantly held his attention.

Nick regarded it thoughtfully; then he felt himself justified in opening it.

The detective was a trifle surprised to find inside two railroad tickets.

They were on a trunk railroad line centering in New York city.

They were not stamped or numbered. Both were for Chicago, with the coupons in due order.

Nick scanned these closely. He turned the envelope over and over in his hand.

Blurred out considerably was a date in one corner.

It was the twelfth day of the preceding month.

Was that the day upon which Hume had visited the city? Nick asked himself.

Further, had these tickets something to do with the "case" the ex-detective had been tempted into accidentally following up?

Nick closely examined the tickets through his magnifying glass.

He split a corner of each with his finger nail, and compared the interior textures of the two tickets.

"Chick," he said, finally, to his assistant, who was interestedly watching him, "look those over."

Nick threw the tickets on the table. Chick took them up in turn, regarding them narrowly.

"Well," he remarked, after a spell—"two unstamped railroad tickets."

"As you see, but—different."

"Different?"

"Yes—one is genuine, one is counterfeit."

"You don't say so. Which is which?"

"I cannot answer that."

"But you know they are different?"

"Yes."

"Then you have run across—"

"The case Hume referred to, I feel pretty certain."

"Do you suppose it has any connection with his enemies?"

"I do."

"Then this is an additional clew?"

"And a vastly good one!"

It was midnight now. Nick lingered but little longer on the active scene of the tragedy.

He awaited the return of one of the local officers, gave him some definite instructions, and started from Latoka an hour later.

By two o'clock Nick and his assistant were back in New York.

Forthwith, each started out on his own particular branch of the Hume murder mystery.

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING THINGS IN SHAPE.

Ten o'clock the next morning found Nick Carter engaged in a conversation with the vice president of the trunk line upon which the two railroad tickets were supposedly good.

The detective announced his suspicions and backed them up with the tickets.

He did not tell how they had come into his possession.

"I am looking here for information," he observed.

"But we want information, too," declared the railroad official.

"That will follow, naturally. These tickets, for us, however, comprise a possible clew to a mysterious murder."

"Ah!"

"I come to you to find out what you have to say about these two samples."

"Why, one is a counterfeit."

"You know that?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Which one?"

The official picked up the two tickets. He scrutinized them, looked at each in turn, and felt them.

His face grew crestfallen, and finally he said, in a desperate way.

"Don't know."

"You don't know?"

The official shook his head.

"But you do not believe both are genuine?"

"Decidedly—no."

"Or both counterfeit?"

"Why, no, Mr. Carter—because the way you bring them enforces what the company has been troubled about for some time."

"Which is?"

"Counterfeit tickets."

"If you are not able to detect the real from the spurious, how have you found them out?"

"Duplicates."

"I see," said Nick.

"Yes," pursued the official—"for about a month we have been aware that some one was swindling us systematically."

"Explain?"

"After the conductors turned in their canceled tickets, the auditor's clerks began to find these duplicates."

"I presume," suggested Nick, "you mean that tickets bearing the same numbers would appear?"

"That is it."

"For instance: Chicago trip ticket No. 9,999 would come in duplicated several times."

"Precisely."

"Now, let me ask what points did the ticket cover, principally?"

"New York to Buffalo, New York to Detroit, New York to Chicago."

"Limited?"

"Never on the limited trains I wish to show you."

"That is right," nodded Nick, as the official made a move to reach a desk drawer.

Thence he produced a pile of punched and canceled tickets and coupons.

With two he illustrated the point in view—demonstrating by placing side by side the detached fragments till two entire tickets were pieced out.

Nick looked over the tickets placed before him.

"Here is ticket No. 2,173, A," he observed.

"Yes."

"Dated the seventh, stamped 'New York,' good from New York to Buffalo."

The official nodded assentingly.

"Here is a lapse at Schenectady; a traveling man probably used this ticket, broke the connection there, resumed his journey a day later, dropped off one train at Rochester, and on the next went on to his destination."

"You route it right, Mr. Carter."

"Duplicate No. 2,173, A, a through passage."

"As it shows."

"The tickets are each properly stamped, all the coupons numbered, in fact, they are precisely alike—"

"Precisely alike."

"Except where they differ," observed Nick, gravely.

"They don't differ!"

"To the careless, unaided eye—no. Under critical examination, with the microscope, yes."

"Do they, indeed?"

"Let me show you."

Nick called for a genuine office ticket. He showed the minute difference in the paper texture, and decided which was the

genuine ticket, but the official looked unsatisfied.

"Very clever," he remarked, "but scarcely a practical point."

"You think not?"

"Why, Mr. Carter, the gatekeepers and conductors cannot all carry microscopes!"

"That is true."

"Nor have any of them the phenomenal eye of Nick Carter!"

"Thanks."

"No—we are helplessly in the hands of these counterfeiters."

"They turn out excellent work, I will admit."

"They must have duplicate types, stamps and numbering machines."

"More than that."

"Eh?"

"They are in touch with this office."

"Oh, now!"

"Certainly."

"How is that?"

"They are aware of your numbering system day by day, or they could not follow so closely into the current series."

"You are right; but who in this office

"Some one must give the information."

The railroad official looked more troubled than ever. Then he said:

"You see, Mr. Carter, we cannot change our tickets without creating immense disorder."

"I can comprehend that."

"We would have to advise agents, sub-agents—notify in a general way the public holding unused unlimited tickets. Three days ago we sent out an order to all conductors to narrowly inspect numbers under two thousand. Immediately every duplicate coming in ran current with those over two thousand."

"Ah! Therefore, you see, the counterfeiters are aware of every move you make?"

"It seems so," admitted the vice-president of the road with a helpless sigh.

"Have you tried to trace any of tickets?" inquired Nick.

"Yes—four we spotted, with difficulty."

"Who had them?"

"We ran them back to the scalpers".

"Then they had been used by innocent purchasers?"

"Two of these tickets gave no account of the New York stub. They started from a point fifty miles away, the scalper selling the intermediate mileage. Oh! the workers of this scheme have us at every point, and will have us till we find them out, and their printing plant. Now then, what are we going to do?"

"You want my advice?"

"Most certainly."

"You will follow my advice?"

"Strictly."

"Remain perfectly quiescent, then."

"And allow this wholesale swindling to go on unchecked!"

"Can you help yourself?"

"Why, no; unless you assist us."

"I will do that, provided you keep hands off."

"It is agreed."

Nick, of necessity, found himself in the whirl of a new and important case.

Only that he was confident that the counterfeit ticket complication dovetailed in some way with the Hume murder affair, he would not have turned aside to consider a diversion from the main issue.

He made some promises, but to the vice-president gave only brief explanation as to his plans.

Nick betook himself to home headquarters, where he expected to find Chick.

Chick was on hand, with the information that the orang-outang hide had been bought at Dibbles' bird store, on Broadway, nearly a month ago, by a negro, or a man disguised as a negro.

"Well, now about the flask label?" Nick interrogated next.

Chick handed over the label Nick had secured from the broken flask at Latoka.

"It was bought there," he declared, indicating its address.

"When?"

"Can't find out."

"Nor by whom?"

"The bartender sells a dozen, more or less, of this size and brand daily."

"Still, they are sold to customers. Any word from Richard Hume?"

"No word from Richard Hume."

"He may go direct to Latoka when he arrives."

"I will manage to be on the spot once or twice during the day. The local police

there affect to have obtained a trace of one or two suspicious parties in the vicinity."

"Hunt them up, Chick."

Nick proceeded to the room containing his dressing case.

He changed his general make-up, left the house, proceeded to the house of a photographer friend, and left there carrying under his arm a long flat object resembling a thin blank book.

The detective proceeded straight back to the railway offices.

Even the vice president did not know him when Nick, personating a stranger, penetrated to his sanctum.

"I want to look over your working force here," explained Nick.

"Ah! Mr. Carter!"

"Give me permission to do so?"

"Why, certainly."

"As a canvasser for enlarged portraits."

"Those are your samples?"

Nick flipped open his book of art.

He proceeded from desk to desk, receiving overtures and rebuffs with equal politeness.

Nick got close views of many faces. He was stopped, however, at the door of a private room.

A man coming out halted the irrepressible canvasser.

"What do you want?" he inquired, shortly.

Nick explained.

"Can't be troubled now."

"But I have permission to canvass the office."

"Nobody but my lady stenographer is there, and she is rushing a piece of important work. Come again."

Nick bowed assentingly. He had passed over the lady force of the office rather rapidly.

It was among the men that he expected to find a suggestive face, if at all.

There was a certain perverseness about the detective, however, when crossed in his intentions.

Nick made an excuse of lingering in the vicinity of the closed room.

He feigned to be interested in a roller map, and he stepped on a stool to look at an obscure county at its top.

Nick shot a glance over the clouded

panes, through the row of clear glass nearer the ceiling.

The room held a young woman; her back was to the door, and she was busy at a typewriter.

She accorded with half a dozen other stenographers Nick had seen in the establishment.

Nick was satisfied. As he was about to step down he lingered to watch the girl's movements, for she had arisen.

Just natural curiosity to see her face, or rather the incentive of systematic thoroughness, held Nick at the map.

The girl passed over to the street window rather rapidly.

It was open a foot—she noiselessly lifted it to the top half sash.

She waved a folded note, leaned out slightly, dropped the note, and then turned.

Facing now, she might see Nick, so the detective descended from the stool without getting a glance at her face.

The inference was that the girl had simply passed a billet-doux to some lorn swain in the street below.

Nick remembered the incident, however, as he left the building devoted to the railroad company's offices.

A stocky young fellow of about twenty-five was just turning from a spot almost directly under the open window.

He crossed the street. His manner was slightly excited, though thoughtful, and he was tearing up a strip of paper.

The fragments fell on the sidewalk near the curb.

Nick turned in that direction; his eyes were cast down, as if naturally.

Slowly he approached the spot containing the fragments of paper, paused, and made a great ado of feeling in his pockets for something.

All the time those keen eyes inspected the paper scraps to learn what they might tell at long range.

They told so much more than he had expected, that Nick Carter was profoundly surprised.

CHAPTER VII.

NEATLY TRAPPED.

At a glance, Nick recognized typewritten characters.

At his feet certainly lay the fragments

of the note dropped from the window by the stenographer.

The detective continued to fumble in his pockets as if for some missing article.

He brought out a pair of spectacles; they were really telescopic lenses that he often found advantageous to use, as on the present occasion.

Nick also produced some letters from an inner coat pocket.

He appeared to be examining them critically, but through the glasses, with lightning glances the detective scanned the pavement.

The paper fragments were brought very near to him now.

Nick selected a letter hap-hazard, and dropped it into his outer coat pocket.

His play over, Nick put up the glasses and strolled on.

The calm, leisurely canvasser strolled on, but inwardly the veteran detective was a good deal worked up.

Nick Carter found himself in the midst of one of those peculiar complications where everything depended on doing just the right thing.

On a scrap of the torn-up letter the detective had positively read a part of a name.

This, in part, was that name:
"Nick Car—"

It was his own, and the auditor's stenographer had recently written it, had just sent the note containing it to the stocky young man whom Nick had noticed.

This individual, Nick, with a rapid sidelong glance, made out posted across the street.

He was watching Nick, and as Nick started up he started up, too.

The conclusion was irresistible—the girl at the typewriter had informed this personage that Nick Carter was in the building.

She had directed him to follow the disguised portrait canvasser, and this the fellow was setting out to do.

It would have been no trick at all for her to have found out that Nick in person had visited the vice-president's office earlier in the evening.

If she had any motive for ascertaining his mission, his second appearance in disguise might have reasonably aroused her suspicions.

The note alone could tell all this.

Nick, of course, made no such foolish move as scaring off the game by possessing himself of the fragments of the torn note, at present.

Still, he wished to possess them; it was necessary that he should possess them.

Nick resolved to get these, and without in the least apprising or arousing the suspicions of the man now most certainly upon his trail.

Nick turned a corner—the fellow, keeping directly opposite, steadily followed on this course, the width of the street apart.

Nick made out a patrolman, twirling his club at the next corner.

He consulted a memoranda book, as if for data—in fact, Nick acted the man puzzled as to some street or building he wished to locate.

He approached the officer, being sure from a veiled glance that the fellow across the street was out of all hearing distance.

"Treat me like some ordinary person making a casual inquiry," said Nick, in an undertone.

The officer stared quizzically.

"Why! what is there extraordinary about you?" he insinuated.

"I am Nick Carter. Stop! don't spoil it."

The patrolman got ready to make profound obeisance.

"We are being watched," went on Nick, rapidly.

"Who's watching?"

"Steady, again. Simply play the obliging official giving information."

"I'm on. Go ahead, Mr. Carter!"

"Very well. You know where the railway offices are—"

"In the next street? Sure!"

"In front, twenty feet west from the main doorway—"

"Twenty feet."

"You will find the fragments of a white note littering the walk and the curb."

"All right."

"Pick them up—all of them—the merest speck. Do it neatly, now—don't attract attention."

"And when I do."

"Put them in an envelope and send them by a speedy and trusted messenger to my home."

Nick mentioned the street and number to make sure of no mistakes.

"To-morrow you will receive a return envelope, containing a slight acknowledgment of your services."

"I don't want that—"

Nick pointed to a street sign now, and the patrolman helped him out by swinging his arm as if directing him somewhere.

Nick passed on—so did his shadow across the street.

After proceeding several squares, the trailer grew bolder.

Nick had not made the slightest movement to indicate watchfulness, although aware of every step that his trailer had taken.

The fellow was closing in upon him; Nick fancied he knew why.

If he suspected the detective's identity, he must be interested in what was going on in the way of an investigation of that counterfeit railroad ticket business.

The letter Nick had slipped into his pocket to help out his play of preoccupation and cover his halt near the note fragments, had been misconstrued by his shadow.

Doubtless, Nick reasoned, the fellow supposed it to be some missive, some instructions Nick had received in the offices he had just left.

He was after the letter.

Nick glanced down at his pocket. This bulged slightly—for a certain reason—but it was a moderately large and deep pocket, and the letter had slipped down into it and out of all view.

As they passed an extensive jewelry store, Nick was enabled to view the entire movements of his shadow.

A line of reflecting mirrors bordered the store windows, and Nick kept an eye on these.

His trailer had quickened his pace. His advance was noiseless and rapid.

Nick saw his hand go out.

Sensitive-nerved, he could feel the slight vibratory touch, as the nimble fingers grazed the top of the bulging pocket.

In—the hand groped.

Snap! the hand jerked.

But it was caught—the professor's animal trap had neatly caged the pickpocket.

He uttered a slight cry—more of consternation than pain.

Nick turned sharply.

"Oh, beg pardon—beg pardon!" stammered his would-be despoiler.

"What's this?" demanded Nick.

The man was trying to pull out his hand.

But he had to pull the little box trap with it to release the holding wire loops.

This Nick endeavored to prevent.

In turning, Nick naturally twisted the coat, putting a double stop on all the man's efforts to get free.

The fellow wretched, but it was of no avail.

"I slipped, and my hand went into your pocket," he explained, bare-facedly.

"Keep it there till I look into things!" said Nick.

"But, sir, release me—it was a simple accident."

"Not so simple!"

"Eh?"

"You must come with me."

"I have an engagement—a pressing engagement, sir."

Nick slipped his fingers down over the man's wrist.

"Make no scene," he advised.

"But—"

"Just walk along with me."

"I object!"

"Shall I call an officer?"

"N—no."

The man flushed, paled—looked humbled, then savage.

Nick walked him along rapidly.

The detective had placed the trap in the pocket of the coat he wore when he had last left home.

He intended to call at the address written on its base.

This Nick had done, to find the man, whom the dead Hume had visited, out of the city.

The presence of the trap in his pocket had operated fortuitously in the detective's behalf.

Nick took the trapped pickpocket home with him.

As he opened the street door and pushed him in, the captive again demurred.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded

"Isn't this better than the police station?"

"Do you live here?"

"I do."

"Then—it's worse!" desperately answered the prisoner.

"Ah!" nodded Nick, comprehendingly.

He was leading the man towards the door of his private room, down the hallway, when the latter made his last reckless defiance.

He twisted behind Nick. His imprisoned hand he could not use, but his free arm he flung around Nick's neck.

In a garroted grasp, he pressed the detective's neck back, using one poised knee for a fulcrum.

It was a peculiar maneuver; the man had brought it into play like an adept of the strangler's art.

Clutching Nick's throat, his intention was to choke him into helplessness and then gouge out his eyes.

"You're wasting time, my friend," observed Nick, calmly.

Still, for the moment Nick was in danger; this he realized.

The detective jerked his elbow against the wall and struck an electric button.

It was one of many placed conveniently and for use about the detective's quarters.

Nick removed his hand from the trapped wrist and swung it around.

Just then, in response to his deft elbow tap, a door burst open.

Into view Chick flung himself, dashed forward and vigorously sent out his clenched hand.

The pickpocket-garroter uttered a groan as Chick's fist thudded squarely on his temple.

He dropped limply towards the floor, his arm dangling from Nick's pocket, which still held him captive.

CHAPTER VIII.

A "FIRST PROOF."

Nick "detached" his wilted captive.

"Carry him in," he ordered.

Patsy had appeared; together they lifted and bore the victim of Chick's blow into an adjacent apartment.

They placed the fellow upon a couch. Over its side, still held in the profes-

sor's ingenious and useful bird trap, dangled the left hand.

Nick was about to release the man's hand when a summons from the street bell sounded, and Nick passed into the adjoining apartment, leaving it to Chick to free the trapped fingers.

His man-servant almost immediately joined him there.

Nick instantly understood who the caller was when the servant handed him an envelope.

"No address, no word—a boy," was explained.

"All right," nodded Nick, and carefully slit the end of the unaddressed envelope.

Nick poured out its contents upon a table.

The patrolman seemed to have done his task well in gathering up the fragments of the torn type-written note.

Even particles trodden on and torn, and those covered with the mud of the street he had included in the collection.

Chick entered the room rather hurriedly, but checked himself with a stare.

"Why, what is that?" he inquired, observing the letter on which Nick was already at work.

"The chief" explained, and Chick stood silent, interestingly watching him.

Nick seemed to be making a map of some ragged island, but he did it quickly, deftly.

He discovered that a few pieces were missing; doubtless they had been blown away or had been carried from their original resting places on the soles of passing pedestrians.

"How is it?" at last inquired Chick.

"Pretty fair patchwork," replied Nick.

His tone was a satisfied one, and Chick asked permission to read.

"Certainly," acceded Nick.

The note, with a few words necessary to be supplied, read:

"Prescott: Nick Carter was here this morning. I believe he is here now, disguised as a portrait canvasser. Follow.

"FLORIBEL."

"Prescott, the man—Floribel, the girl," observed Nick; "very good!"

Nick swept the note fragments into a drawer, locked it and then arose.

"The man first," he continued.

"It was about him," began Chick, with a vivid start, as of important recollection—"it was about him that I broke in on you."

"Just now?"

"And I forgot—for the moment. Come and see him."

Chick was quite imperative.

"Recovered?"

"He hadn't when I left him, but—there's something queer!"

"Queer?"

"One hand—the hand in the trap—"

"Yes?"

"See for yourself—there it is."

"Yes, here it is!" added Patsy at the side of the couch where the pickpocket lay.

Patsy was holding his dangling hand. They had removed it from the trap.

Its palm bore black uniform marks. Nick now examined the hand.

"We make it out," explained Patsy, "that he must have recently had his hand set with a good deal of pressure over wet or fresh printing."

"No, not over a printed sheet or card," said Nick; "for in that case the impression on the hand would be reversed, like the reflection of printed matter in a mirror."

"Then the print on this man's palm," said Chick, "must have come from the original type."

"Yes, from the original type, surely," declared Nick.

"Accidentally or intentionally this hand has rested on a body of type—on a galley, or in a chase. The type were inked just enough to print clearly."

"A 'first proof!'" suggested Chick.

"A first proof, indeed—but of what? Why!" observed Nick, in a stimulating tone, "this is rather convincing!"

Nick had recourse again to his magnifying glass.

If the detective had before doubted the pickpocket's connection with the counterfeit ticket enterprise, he did so no longer.

What was marked on the man's hand was the impress of part of a railroad ticket.

It was a ticket, too, on the railroad that Nick had discovered was being swindled.

"I fancy we have things on the sure turn," remarked Nick.

"This man is in the ticket counterfeit combination beyond any doubt," asserted Chick.

"In fact," pursued Nick, "he must have come direct from the crooked printing plant to the vicinity of the railroad offices."

"For information, or for further ticket details, from the girl Floribel."

Chick was immensely gratified—they were getting on famously, it seemed.

"S-st!" spoke Nick, warningly.

The captive stirred, sat up, stared vaguely, rubbed his contused temple, and scowled darkly.

Nick drew up a chair and faced him.

"Well, how is it by this time, my friend?" he observed, urbanely.

"How do you suppose?"

"I am asking."

"What hit me—a sledge hammer?"

"What is your specialty—strangling?" retorted Nick.

"Well, go on with your trial."

"Inquest, my friend," suggested Nick. The prisoner started.

"What do you mean by that?" he inquired.

"Can you not imagine—Prescott?"

Again the prisoner started—broken up severely this time.

"I can't," he growled, slowly.

"I brought you here to get a little information."

"Ah!"

"About a murderous orang-outang."

The fellow tried to hold his face steady—this sudden shot unnerved him.

"Then, about some queer railroad tickets—incidentally, further, concerning your Floribel."

Despite the sickly yellow of apprehension creeping into the culprit's face, he essayed careless contempt.

"This is all Greek to me!" he declared.

"That, at least, is English!"

"What is?"

Nick indicated the hand bearing the type impression.

"Hah!" sharply ejaculated Prescott.

His very urgency in impulsively hiding the hand betrayed what his actions had not already told.

"Where is the printing office?" pursued Nick.

Prescott set his face grim and hard.

His eyes evinced extreme dread, however—and he seemed pondering over Nick's rapid and pertinent observations with unmistakable anxiety and wonderment.

Nick took out his watch.

"Take five minutes," he announced.

"What for?"

"To reflect."

"For what end?"

"A rope's end."

"Greek again!"

"Somebody has earned it."

"How?"

"In the orang-outang skin—this. Do you observe?"

Nick had swung open abruptly and dramatically the door of a cabinet.

There hung the identical "disguise" that had been abandoned in the well at Latoka.

Prescott fairly shriveled—a fit of trembling overcame him.

Nick beckoned to Patsy, and left Chick to attend to the disturbed prisoner.

The detective indited a brief note. He directed it to his little lady assistant.

"Give that to Ida," Nick directed Patsy, "and be as speedy as you can, though."

Patsy departed on his errand.

The note instructed Ida to interest herself in the auditor's stenographer.

This girl, Floribel, had given evidence that she was an active figure in the counterfeit ticket scheme.

Nick had no doubt whatever that this enterprising young lady was furnishing inside information of the railroad office to the outsiders represented by his present prisoner, Prescott.

When Nick came back to the inner apartment he found the situation unchanged.

Chick was keeping an eagle eye on the captive, and the latter, with a wholesome recollection of Chick's stout fist, seemed to have dropped all ideas of resistance and flight.

"Well," demanded Nick, briskly, "have you reflected upon your position?"

"I have," responded Prescott, with a prompt willingness Nick had not anticipated.

"You know what we want?"

"You want too much—more than I

know. But go on with your questioning."

"First, I would like to know about those railroad tickets."

"You seem to have the dead wood on that!"

"Believe me, I have."

"You would like to find the printing office?"

"I am bound to find the printing office!"

"Suppose I show you, what concession will you make me?"

"What do you expect?"

"A show to shake the dust of New York off my sandals."

"Alone?"

"No—I have a lady friend mutually interested."

"Floribel?"

"I'm not saying. Come, Mr. Nick Carter, pass your word."

"No!" negatived Nick, promptly. "Do your duty, and we will consider the question of concession later on."

Prescott looked disappointed.

"That's the best you'll do?"

"The very best."

"I suppose it will have to do!" muttered Prescott. "Come on."

"You will show up the plant?"

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and I've got to!"

CHAPTER IX.

A STARTLING PERFORMANCE.

Nick was watchful—Chick suspicious; both felt that they were handling a slippery customer.

Nick prefaced the jaunt on which Prescott was to act the pilot with a few pithy and pertinent remarks.

He gave the prisoner to understand that a break would be dangerous—that treachery would materially diminish his "good behavior chances."

"Oh, I know when I'm in the soup," declared Prescott.

"You are in it," declared Nick.

"Deep, too; and I won't refuse the hand of Nick Carter to help me out."

"That will depend solely on yourself."

"You want me to turn up what you are after?"

"I want you to point out the source of those counterfeit railroad tickets."

"It shall be done!"

With one on each side of him, Prescott proceeded on his way. The plant was over on the east side; he thus enlightened his companions at the start.

He led the detectives into a settlement made up principally of junk shops and rag warehouses.

"Now we're pretty near the scene," declared Prescott, halting where a court cut in from the street.

"Go straight ahead, then," encouraged Nick.

"I'm thinking," demurred Prescott, "of my own precious skin!"

"Explain that."

"If I am seen by those I do not wish to see——"

"How many?"

"Oh! say four."

"We will handle the four."

"I'll allow you can do it, Mr. Carter, but they'll fill me with lead as an introductory overture."

"What then do you propose?"

"To show you the plant——"

"At a distance?"

"At a safe distance!"

"And then?"

"Why, you send me somewhere for temporary keeping till you think its safe to let me go."

Prescott's cool assurance was monumental, but Nick did not comment upon this.

"Very well," he agreed, "give us a brid's-eye view of the layout, then."

Nick insisted on holding the pilot's wrist as he led the way down the wretched court.

Then Prescott pointed to an unoccupied four-story brick structure, well gone to ruin.

"We'll go in there," he announced.

"Necessary?"

"It's my way of doing it."

Up rickety staircases they tramped to a third story.

Prescott approached one of the windows, craned his neck, turned away and shook his head.

"Can't get a squint," he declared.

"Where is the place?"

"Generally speaking, in among those buildings."

"Lining the court?"

"Facing the court, yes."

"Well, point it out."

"Don't you want the exact rooms?"

"Certainly."

"Then give me a chance to show them to you."

"Set about it," advised Nick, a trifle sharply.

"All right—the roof next."

"Let it be the roof. But end this needless circumlocution there."

"It isn't needless. I want to be safe from sight and reach of the gang I'm giving away."

They got to the roof.

"Ah! this will do," observed Prescott, approaching the side of the roof.

Here a row of loose bricks stood on the coping stone.

Prescott leaned over and glanced down and across the court.

Kneeling on the roof, with one hand resting on the row of loose bricks, he pointed with the other.

"Do you see the second building?" he inquired.

"I see it," answered Nick, briefly.

"Run your eye down."

"I am doing so."

"Fourth story, third window from the eastern corner."

"Yes—is that the room where your friends are?"

"The printing establishment, yes."

"Mark it, Chick," directed Nick.

"I have done it."

"So shall I!"

Prescott's voice rang out with sharp suddenness.

Simultaneously he described a wonderfully rapid movement.

Bounding to his feet, his hand shot back, holding one of the loose bricks.

Aiming as at a prize target, he let the missile drive.

It cut the air whizzingly—straight as a die it crossed the court.

The brick struck the window at which Prescott had been pointing with his other hand.

The lower sash about three feet square, comprising four panes, was struck in the centre and shattered in a flash.

A piercing yell—a series of them—evidenced Prescott's plan and purpose and disturbed the sleepy echoes of the court.

Instantly one face, two faces, dimly

flitted by the aperture the brick had made.

Down came a shade; it flapped in the breeze, but it obscured what was going on beyond. Prescott sneered in Nick Carter's face.

"I told you I'd show you!" he said, derisively.

"I will show you—now!" observed the detective, grimly. "Chick—below!"

There was no doubt whatever in the minds of either of the two detectives that Prescott had indicated the headquarters of his crowd.

That missile and Prescott's yell, the detectives were further convinced, comprised an understood warning.

The wily fellow had got his captors into a position where prompt action would be deterred.

Still, Chick was making for the street in a flash. As Perscott stooped to secure a second brick, Nick whipped out a pair of steel handcuffs.

"This is likely to cost you something," observed Nick, as he forced his captive before him.

"Did you think I was selling out my bread and butter?" jeered Prescott.

"The State will provide that—free—for a spell."

"Prove a point against me!" defied Prescott, audaciously.

Proofs direct were of course lacking.

That did not daunt the detective, and as he gained the street he comprehended that his energetic assistant had lost no time.

The latter was disappearing through a doorway in the building with the shattered window.

A police officer he had managed to summon was following him rapidly.

Down the court a man was speeding, as if to summon other police aid.

"Better get into movement yourself, Mr. Carter?" railed the captive.

"A bird in the hand, my friend!" observed Nick, composedly.

"I'm only the carrier dove."

"Ah!"

"The eagles won't wait to be trapped."

"We shall see."

Nick hurried the man to the main thoroughfare; in two minutes he had him inside a cab, rattling its way toward the nearest police station. When he returned

to the scene of activity. Nick found two policemen at the court door of the structure Prescott had so sensationaly indicated.

They were only vaguely aware that a raid, a robbery, a murder, were "in the air."

"We're watching here," observed one of them, as Nick made himself known.

"What for?"

"We haven't been told yet—our partners have gone up."

Nick dashed up the stairs, three at a time.

He entered the room with the shattered window; its door was swinging by one hinge.

Two policemen were standing in the middle of the room, stupidly waiting for something to turn up.

It held a small printing press, a numbering machine, and several minor printing office devices.

Upon an imposing stone were a lot of iron chases.

They had apparently recently held an orderly array of type, but this was all mixed, broken, and lay in a heap upon the imposing stone.

"What have you found?" inquired Nick, quickly.

One of the police swept a hand about him.

"This," he said, simply.

"But, my friend—the person with whom you came up here?"

"He broke down the door, got in, called to me; I followed, but you see he's gone?"

"Gone—where?" inquired Nick, gazing into the second room of the suite."

"You tell!"

It was a problem. Chick was nowhere about. The windows of the second room were locked down and the shades drawn.

But passing around a paper cutter Nick nearly stepped into an open aperture.

It was a trap three feet square. It led down by means of a rope into a vacant room.

Nick slid down the cable, feeling sure that Chick had preceded him by the same route.

Below was an open door, then a corridor and an enclosed staircase, and in a few moments Nick reached the ground floor.

An open stairway led to the cellar; a door led to the front.

Nick opened this latter—as he did so he averted his face momentarily.

A strong gust of noxious air penetrated his nostrils and lungs.

"Gas!" soliloquized Nick.

The apartment was a store, fronting on the street, but shaded and apparently in disuse.

It had once been a barber shop, and its last tenants' belongings had probably been retained for unpaid rent.

In a barber's chair, with his head strapped to the back rest was a human being.

From a gas jet in the ceiling ran a rubber tube, and the end of this rested in the mouth of the occupant of the chair.

It was Chick—ghastly close to his last gasp!

CHAPTER X.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

The detective had his imperiled assistant out of the chair in an instant.

Nick dragged Chick from the gas-imregnated room, and in a few minutes brought him to consciousness.

"I dropped almost upon them," narrated Chick.

"How many?"

"Four."

"They were too many for you?"

"I got a rap from three revolver handles at the same time. They laid me out—then fastened me in the chair."

"And then they skipped," commented Nick.

There was only one logical line to follow—the cellar stairs.

At the rear a door was open. Beyond was a yard space, an alley.

The birds had flown—the eagles had taken the wing, indeed!

Nick found no encouragement in a blind pursuit.

They went over the printing establishment. Brief as had been the warning conveyed, the counterfeiters had not left a single incriminating hint behind them.

They had smashed and shattered every plate, and inextricably mixed all the type that established the fact of the kind of work they had been engaged in.

In a grate a heap of crisp cinders told of a hasty fire.

"There is nothing here to linger for," observed Nick, regretfully.

They went over the back course again. At the end of the cellar way Nick noticed in one corner a door off its hinges, propped up against the foundation wall.

The natural spirit of investigation moved him to draw this door aside.

A hole in the foundation wall was revealed. It let into the abutting building.

They found this untenanted and unfurnished.

Nick ascended the stairs, kicking off from his boots the moist clay of the uncemented cellar.

Chick, ascending after his colleague, found Nick inspecting the floor rather sharply.

Upon it and across it was a clayey track. It was dry, powdery, but clearly outlining the shape of human feet.

It led to the inside wall of a room—stopped at a door not two feet square set into the partition.

"Here is something!" declared Chick, following up Nick's discovery.

"Apparently."

"Open that door."

"Locked."

Nick took a wire from his exigency case, and inspected the lock.

"Old, but intricate," he reported. "We shall have to force it."

"What of that?"

"Let us see, first."

Nick reached clear through the key-hole with the wire; he pushed and prodded.

"Something in there?" inquired Chick.

"Assuredly."

"A sort of a cupboard."

"Yes."

Chick made no suggestions. He observed that his companion was reflecting, and he was assured that Nick Carter would soon see the light.

Nick went around to the opposite side of the wall in another apartment.

It backed on the jog of a dark, narrow passage way.

Nick took out a knife. He sounded the wall with its handle, then he attacked the wall with its blade.

Chick traced his chief's intentions, and was silently watchful.

When he had cut through a coat of thin plaster and a layer of lath, Nick struck a square board—the back of the shallow wall pocket.

"A screw at each corner," he announced.

Nick sent his assistant away for a screwdriver and a candle.

Within ten minutes he had the board lifted from place. Nick reached into the cranny.

He brought out a square package about the size of a lady's shopping reticule.

This was enclosed in manilla paper, and tied round and round. Nick carefully undid it; he surmised the contents before they were revealed.

"Railroad tickets!" observed Chick.

Nick looked the lot over. Divided into packages, there were nearly a thousand of the counterfeit tickets.

They were fresh and new, all ready for use, even to the numbering, except the stamp of the issuing date.

Nick restored the package to its original appearance.

He replaced it, and screwed into place the board back of the aperture.

The mortar and lath litter was cleaned up and removed to a mud hole in the cellar.

In the room where the wall cubby hole fronted there stood but one article.

This was the drum of a galvanized iron furnace.

It had never been used apparently, but Nick decided to place it to some use now.

He inspected it, then moved it about so that the opening was towards the wall.

"What next?" interrogated Chick.

Nick pointed to the little cupboard in the partition.

"Is not that suggestive?" he intimated.

"You think some one may come after those tickets?"

"So surely, Chick, that this room must be kept under surveillance till we catch the caller."

"The tickets may have belonged to Prescott?"

Here Nick astonished Chick with a piece of succinct information.

"They do belong to Prescott, in fact."

"Why! you know that?"

"His name is scribbled on the wrapper."

"He can't come after them?"

"No—but he can send. In trouble, he will be sure to worry over them. First, he may desire to use them through others, to get money to ease along his situation; next, they comprise incriminating evidence."

"All we have, in fact."

"Documentary—and with his name on the package, the proof would be convincing."

"Then we remain?"

"I shall remain for a spell," said Nick; "you may do a few little errands for me."

Nick apprised Chick of the details of these, and directed him to replace the cellar door with exactitude, going and coming.

At the end of three hours Chick came back with what his superior had sent him for.

He brought certain necessary accessories for a comfortable night's vigil, some disguise adjuncts, and—information.

This latter greeted Nick in the form of something of a surprise.

"Ida sends word," said Chick.

"Ah! so soon?"

"Yes. Patsy did not reach her until three o'clock."

"And then?"

"She took up the matter of the stenographer, Floribel, but did not find her."

"How was that?"

"The young lady received a letter by messenger at 2:30 o'clock, left her desk abruptly, and did not return."

"Where does she live? Did Ida find that out?"

"Found it out, to get there ten minutes after the girl had left with her trunks."

"Ah!" murmured Nick—"warned?"

"You mean by Prescott?"

"Possibly—or by the people here. Never mind," continued Nick Carter, enigmatically, "perhaps that helps us!"

At midnight that which the shrewd detective had anticipated came about.

Some one arrived in the old building—by the cellar route.

The two detectives heard the door at the foundation wall lifted back.

Light footsteps ascended the stairs; Nick and Chick pressed close within the capacious furnace drum.

At the doorway of the room a cautious figure paused.

A listening attitude, a quick breath of relief, and then a match was struck.

"A woman!" whispered Chick.

The trespasser wore a light veil; the face could not be distinctly seen.

But Nick at once identified the trim, graceful form.

"Floribel," he breathed to his companion.

"Then Prescott sent her word?"

"As we shall see."

The match went out, but not before the intruder had produced a key.

They could hear her turn it in the lock of the little cubby hole.

Its door came open, she took out the package; then she flitted away.

"Leave her to me," directed Nick to his companion.

"You will meet me at home headquarters?"

"In an hour."

Nick was rubber-shod at heel and toe, purposely for exigencies.

He followed the girl from the building to the street, and down the street.

At any moment he could have overtaken and detained her; but it was not the detective's present purpose.

Nick wished to see where she was going with the package of counterfeit tickets—whom she would meet—where her new place of hiding might be.

She was leading him a puzzling and unusual course, for it turned at last into a street devoted to manufacturing.

She paused in front of one of the places, running in full blast.

It was at the open door of the boiler room of the establishment.

Floribel peered in, then stepped in—just over the threshold.

Nick skirted the spot on a guarded detour, and got in range of the doorway.

Inside the engineer had just pulled open the fire doors of the immense boiler.

He passed to one side to scoop up a new supply of fuel.

The girl, Floribel, had watched for just this opportunity, it seemed.

To Nick's extreme disappointment, she gave the package she bore a fling. It

went in among the blazing coals; in a moment it was ashes.

The girl turned now before the fireman saw her.

Heretofore, her gait had been nervous and hasty.

At present it was more leisurely and steady.

From her pocket she drew a letter as she passed along.

She wetted the flap, sealed it, and carried it in her hand.

Nick saw her looking for a letter box as she passed out of the manufacturing street.

Floribel's purpose was clear. She had awaited the mailing of this letter until a certain thing had been accomplished.

That act was undoubtedly the disposing of the incriminating counterfeits.

It was time to make a definite move; Nick glided forward.

Deftly he swept the letter into his own possession; then he seized the girl's arm.

She shrank, and began a scream of alarm.

Something in Nick's face checked the utterance; she stared with gleaming eyes.

"I think you understand?" said Nick, calmly.

"I—think—I—do!" she faltered.

They were under a lamp post—her face was quite clearly revealed now.

"You are some one I know, it appears to me," observed Nick.

The girl did not reply.

"I will correct that," added Nick; "you remind me of some one whom I have known, rather."

"Sir!" began the girl, drawing herself up, "you are laboring under an error."

"And you, young lady," responded Nick Carter, incisively, "you are under arrest."

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER JUMPS A TRAIN.

Tireless Nick Carter sat at his desk; it was 2 o'clock in the morning.

He was folding up a letter—the one which he had prevented Floribel from mailing.

Chick sat opposite to him, and he now inquired:

"The clew?"

"The clew direct," answered Nick.

"At last!"

"If nothing leaks out between now and to-morrow, we shall have our men."

"The ones who tried to asphyxiate me?"

"No—those seem to be mere subordinates."

"Is that true?"

"Judging from this letter. It is written by Floribel, and addressed to a man at Hampden."

"Name?"

"He is posing as a granger—as Silas Steele."

"Only posing?"

"Yes, for the girl gives his real name inside the letter."

"Which is?"

"Nate Durbin."

"One of the bank wreckers."

"One of them, assuredly. The letter describes the break up and Prescott's plight. It tells Durbin that he must come to New York at once, and send for Baxter to come also to get Prescott out of his scrape."

"Baxter! that is the second of the bank wreckers recently liberated?"

"That is true. Between them the counterfeit tickets are worked off, and the accountability of the Hume murder rests."

"Then you propose?"

"To send the letter by the first mail in the morning."

"And follow it?"

"No, Chick—go right with it."

"Alone?"

"I shall need you. Now, then, you spoke of a report from Patsy?"

"Yes. He ran down the orang-outang sold to Hume."

"That is good news."

"It was bought from an honest showman in New Jersey."

"What does he say?"

"He sold it to Baxter."

"Did he know Baxter, then?"

"No, but he describes him, and the description is accurate. The red birthmark on the left temple settled the identity."

Nick was consulting a railroad time guide.

"We leave at 7:15;" he said, "by the first train. I will reseal the letter—mail

it at once, and it will be taken up in time to make the journey down to Hampden with us."

"Silas Steele" was the fictitious name given on the envelope.

The fictitious Silas Steele, the real Durbin, appeared at the post office in Hampden to claim it at 10 o'clock the next morning.

He was the typical granger, as a sentence in the letter had hinted, and Nick and Chick were on hand waiting for the man to call for his mail.

Meantime, Nick had made some cautious inquiries.

Durbin came to the town, a railroad junction, about twice a week.

On such occasions he met a friend—"a man with a red scar on one side of his face."

On other days he was busy traveling up and down the line.

He claimed to be selling patent rights, although no one in Hampden had been given a chance to know what these were.

Nick watched Durbin closely as he opened the letter.

The feigned stupidity of a country bumpkin gave place to acute alarm.

Durbin read and reread the letter; he seemed seriously discomposed.

He repaired to the hotel, paid his bill, and started for the station, carrying a satchel in his hand.

Nick suggested to Chick that it would be wise to separate, so as not to excite attention.

"Your especial duty will be to round up this man when the proper moment arrives," instructed Nick.

"Why not now?"

"Oh, not till he gives us an idea as to where he expects to meet Baxter."

"You more particularly wish to run down Baxter?"

"Why not? He is the one who purchased the orang-outang?"

"That we know—and probably he was the head mover in the entire scheme, or set of schemes."

Nick kept close to Durbin; soon he was rewarded.

Durbin made some inquiries of the station agent.

"Is the eleven-thirty on time?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then it will arrive here——"

"In New York at eleven-thirty."

"It does not stop here!" exclaimed Durbin in surprise.

"No."

"I didn't know that. Why! I have a friend aboard who was to stop here."

"He will have to go on to Como, and make connections back."

"Can't you flag the train?"

"Oh, no!"

Durbin went out on the platform, looking annoyed and disappointed.

He never set down his satchel, although one handle was broken and the other loose.

Nick noted this fact, and planned accordingly. He put himself in the way of the bank wrecker.

Finally, the latter was impelled to talk about his troubles.

He grumbled at the courtesy of the agent—at the way the road "ran things!"

At last the 11:30 whistled in the distance.

Nick felt assured that the friend whom Durbin was expecting was Baxter.

Durbin had intimated that he did not believe his friend would go on to Como, and come back to Hampden.

"He'll very likely go into the city, and wire me to meet him there," he complained.

The detective eyed the satchel the man carried; he considered the probabilities, and reasoned that if Baxter went on to New York, and found things disorganized, he might elect to disappear.

The train came in sight around a long curve. It slowed up slightly for the station.

Nick shot a significant glance at Chick, in the background.

He braced his nerves and muscles for an effort rather audacious than hazardous.

The locomotive went by—the first coach, the second.

Nick's hand shot out.

"Hold on!"

A dexterous grab, and Nick had torn the satchel free from the hand of its owner.

Its handles only were left in the grasp of the latter.

The detective seized the platform rail as the last coach whizzed by.

In a flash Nick Carter was whirled out of reach.

CHAPTER XII.

NICK CARTER TAKES CHANCES.

The train whirled on.

Nick glanced through the rear window of the coach; then he entered.

The conductor chanced to be close to the door.

He was on the rear side seat, arranging the tickets collected on his run.

Nick slipped the appropriated handbag under the seat, and sat down on its arm.

"Conductor," he whispered in the startled man's ear—"I am Nick Carter."

"You are—"

The conductor knew the name—who did not?

"Talk low," continued Nick. "Of course you know about the counterfeit ticket business?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Been advised?"

"Officially, twice. I was just scanning the tickets with a bare hope of finding out if I'd been buncoed."

"Let me have a look."

The conductor got up, and the detective sat down.

Nick ran over the various tickets. He sorted them down to less than a dozen that by any circumstance could be "crooked."

Nick applied the end-splitting test.

Nick finally held up a ticket.

"See that?" he inquired.

"I see it," nodded the conductor.

"Counterfeit."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes."

"I would never have known it."

"You know it now. Who gave it to you?"

"I took it up at Rochester."

"Yes."

The conductor rubbed his head thoughtfully.

He ran his eye over the car.

"I have it!" he exclaimed.

"Not so loud."

"Oh, he's asleep."

"Who is?"

"The original holder of that ticket."

"Point him out to me."

"That man." The conductor indicated a man occupying a seat by himself. He wore a hat pulled down over his eyes and face. His back was to the observers, so Nick could study him at leisure. He did so for a moment. Then he inquired:

"You are sure of the man?"

"Positive. Wait; I'll be back in a minute."

The conductor passed up the aisle and back again:

"Yes," he reported to Nick, "he is the passenger."

"You have found that out positively?"

"I knew it before."

"But now?"

"I know it surer. That personal trip check of mine in his hat—"

"I understand," interrupted Nick. "Lend me your cap."

Nick transformed himself into a conductor, as far as headgear went.

He proceeded to the front of the car, and leisurely strolled down the aisle.

As he reached the lounging passenger, Nick called out:

"Tickets!"

The man did not look up. Nick seized the check in his hat—but not the check alone.

A twirl, as if done carelessly or clumsily, and check and hat were both lifted.

That face came into view; in an instant Nick recognized it.

He had only the day previous studied his counterfeit presentment in the rogues' gallery at New York Police Headquarters.

Besides, the tell-tale red birthmark on the left temple was perfectly convincing.

The man had not been sleeping, for he sprang up, his eyes not only wakeful, but suspicious.

"Beg pardon," said Nick—"Mr. Baxter."

"What!"

The crook's hand shot to his hip pocket.

Nick anticipated the move; he instantly struck up the groping fingers.

Just here the conductor spoiled all; he had seen the menacing action.

He sprang down the aisle, and instead of helping he got in Nick's way.

With a bound, the alarmed criminal cleared the seat back in front of him.

He was out of the front car door in a flash, and disappeared.

"Jumped the train!" cried the conductor, seizing the bell-cord.

Nick passed him on a rush for the rear door. He reached the platform.

Baxter was nowhere in sight, but Nick was sure that the desperate fellow had left the train.

Nick Carter took chances; the train was lessening its speed.

Nick made a jump into space, and landed in some bushes, bruised and scratched a trifle only.

Nick passed down the tracks. Two hundred yards accomplished, a groan guided him.

The bank wrecker lay over in the brush and high grass.

He had struck a pile of ties in his reckless jump, sustaining a frightful shock.

With one arm broken, he lay helpless where he had landed.

Nick bent over him; Baxter bestowed upon the detective the glance of a baffled, beaten man.

"Wanted—I know!" he groaned.

"The Hume murder?" said Nick, briefly.

"Yes!" assented Baxter, closing his eyes.

Nick got him to New York shortly after noon, and into a hospital, but under strict police surveillance.

Chick brought down Durbin on the afternoon express.

Then there was a clearing up of details.

Baxter fancied himself done for, and rather gloated over the "revenge" he had executed.

He was not dying, and he knew the next morning that the electric chair stared him in the face, but he was "dead game." He realized that Nick had him "pinned down," and did not go back on his story.

That afternoon Nick apprised Chick that it was probable that the counterfeit tickets found in Durbin's satchel comprised about all the crooked ones extant.

The four industrial accomplices had been run down the evening previous.

"I understand that Richard Hume arrived home to-day?" said Chick.

"Yes," assented the detective.

"Did you see him?"

"I saw him; he was left behind from the train out West, at a way station, was taken ill, and thus detained."

"And why did he warn his father?"

"He met a former partner of the Baxter-Durbin crowd, who told him of the intentions of the gang. He came on at once. An impulse of alarm caused him to send the mysterious telegram to me."

"His father's death will be avenged."

"My old professional friend's memory shall have justice dealt out—yes," proceeded Nick Carter, solemnly. "It seems that Hume, that day in New York, ran across two men who were conversing in a restaurant about the counterfeit tickets, and he secretly secured the samples."

"Intending later to resume a little private work on the case?" questioned Chick.

"I think so. It was through that misstep that he was shadowed home and identified."

"And about the girl, Floribel?"

She was planted by the conspirators in the railway office."

"An old hand, then?"

"Not exactly, Chick," observed Nick, gravely—"but she comes of a bad stock."

"How?"

"She is the daughter of that notorious Mrs. Lucia Dupuy, whom we sent up for the big express robbery last month; so we rather satisfactorily closed up a hard-fought case, and take a brief rest, Chick."

"Till the next case comes along!" returned Nick Carter's clever assistant.

[THE. END.]

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